<u>Searching the Web – a Passover Website</u>

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A website on the holiday of Passover was developed by eighth grade students at the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School, located in Rockville, Maryland. The website, http://www.cesjds.org/~passover/, includes translations of selections from the *Shulchan Aruch* (the most prominent code of Jewish law, compiled by Rabbi Joseph Caro), summaries of *midrashim* (interpretations of Biblical verses), students' own personal expressions about the meaning of Passover, and an annotated bibliography of Passover related links to other websites. The technology department guided the development of the technical aspects of the web site. A photography student and faculty members of the school's photography and video department worked on the photography. The following is a description of the process used in the development of this website and the educational implications of both its development and use.

<u>I. Rationale</u>
The rationale for this website project relates to both the cognitive and affective aspects of education. On a cognitive level, students should increase their understanding of the meaning of Passover. They should develop their knowledge of the practices associated with Passover and the reasons for these practices. They should also develop their skills and comfort level in using traditional rabbinic sources, such as the *Shulchan Aruch*. It is also important for students to become familiar with and be able to locate easily the wide variety of websites on Judaism, in general, and Passover, in particular.

The rationale on the affective level is also of importance. Understanding the meaning of Passover, mentioned above as part of the rationale on a cognitive level, is also part of the rationale on the affective level. The students need to appreciate the value of studying the subject matter, and it is hoped that understanding the meaning of the subject matter will lead to this appreciation. Part of the affective rationale for this project was for the students to derive satisfaction from the project. This satisfaction would be derived from the learning inherent in the preparation of the website. They would also derive satisfaction by working toward a final goal—the production of a website, which would be made public and which would be in the Jewish public interest. The fun associated with computer use, especially preparing and using websites, could only enhance the project and provide further enjoyment for the students. Part of the affective rationale is for the students to develop an interest in using these websites.

This rationale can be articulated by the following objectives:
   <u>Objectives</u>
1. The students will learn how to locate a specific volume of the *Shulchan Aruch* in a library.
2. The students will learn how to locate a specific citation in the *Shulchan Aruch*.

3. The students will develop access skills necessary for reading and understanding the *Shulchan Aruch*.
4. The students will understand the role of the notes of Rabbi Moses Isserles on the *Shulchan Aruch*.
5. The students will learn specific practices about Passover and the reasons for these practices.
6. The students will learn how to locate a specific reference in *Midrash Rabbah*.
7. The students will learn the methodology of *midrash* in deriving lessons from Biblical verses.
8. The students will learn how to use software in the study of classical Jewish texts.
9. The students will see the complementary roles of *halacha* and *aggada*.
10. The students will reflect on the meaning of Passover.
11. The students will develop an inclination to use websites about Judaism, in general, and Passover, in particular.
12. The students will appreciate the value of using modern technology in the study of classical Jewish texts.
13. The students will have fun using the website, as they pursue sites of special interest and those on the lighter side (e.g., Passover games and puzzles).

II. Methodology for Developing the Website
A. *Shulchan Aruch* Section
The students in two eighth grade classes were divided into seven groups. Each group was assigned a section from *Orach Chaim* of the *Shulchan Aruch* to look up and translate. The passages selected were on the following topics: searching for *chametz*, the day before Passover, the *seder*, the Passover prayer services, and the counting of the *omer*. The students were shown how to locate their assigned section in the following: the standard edition of the *Shulchan Aruch* (with all four sections), the *Mishnah Berura* edition of the *Shulchan Aruch* (with only *Orach Chaim*), and the CD-Daf library data-base. (The primary feature of CD-Daf, which is produced by The Torah Communications Network, is the audio lecture explaining talmudic tractates. It also has a data-base which includes the Bible, the Babylonian Talmud, Talmudic commentaries, and codes. CD-Daf and Judaic Classics, mentioned below, are discussed in an article by this writer in the *Melton Journal*, published by the Melton Center of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, http://www.jtsa.edu/, in the fall of 2002. The direct link for this article is "Talmudic Texts and Technological Tools" .) Sections from the *Shulchan Aruch* were selected because of their importance and the likely interest in them--for both the students preparing the material and the anticipated broad based audience of adult and young readers. Additionally, consideration was given to the level of difficulty of the Hebrew and the concepts in the text. The level had to be such that the students could understand the material with a good amount of independence.

The students wrote translations of their selections, with assistance from the teacher in translating some words and in editing their work. After the completion of each section, steps were taken to ensure that the format (layout of the page, computer font, use of italics, etc.) was consistent. The notes of Rabbi Moses Isserles were italicized to set them

apart from the main text of the *Shulchan Aruch*, as is done by the use of "Rashi script" in the printed editions of the *Shulchan Aruch*.

B. *Midrash* Section

The procedure used in the preparation of *Shulchan Aruch* unit was also used in preparing the section on *midrash*. Each group's *midrash* selection was taken from *Exodus Rabbah*, because of its connection with the exodus from Egypt. The selection of the material was based on the same criteria as those used for the *Shulchan Aruch* unit, except that the *midrash* selection was studied in English. Studying the *midrash* in the original would have presented too many barriers to the students in understanding the methodology of *midrash*, in general, and the specific selection, in particular. The English translation of *Exodus Rabbah* was available to all the students on the Judaic Classics data-base, which includes *Exodus Rabbah* in the original and in English translation. Each student was able to access *Exodus Rabbah* on a computer individually, as the school installed a network version of Judaic Classics, which enabled access to it from an unlimited number of computers at one time. (Judaic Classics also includes the Bible and Talmud in the original and in English, as well as Talmudic commentaries in the original. Judaic Classics also has a search apparatus, enabling one to locate passages containing certain words or combinations of words.)

The students were guided in the study of their *midrash* selection by a worksheet which was divided into two parts. The following is the text of that worksheet:

Part I

1. Locate all of the Biblical verses cited in the *midrash* (the verse being discussed in the *midrash* and those verses being cited from elsewhere) and write them out in their entirety in English. Jot down a few notes about the context of these verses. If certain phrases are receiving special attention, locate these phrases in the Hebrew and jot them down.
2. What is the message of this *midrash*? (When reading the *midrash*, be sure to look at the footnotes, as these notes may help in understanding this message.)
3. Explain how the Biblical verses are interpreted to arrive at this message.
4. How can the message in the *midrash* apply to situations in your life or in the lives of others?

Part II

Write a simplified version of the *midrash*. Include all the important details and leave out information that may be distracting to the reader. Explain any terms that may not be familiar to someone with minimal background in Judaism. Include your views about what can be learned from this *midrash* and how the message of the *midrash* can be applied to our lives.

This two part process was implemented, since the style of the *midrash* may not be familiar to many of the students. The purpose of Part I was to have the students see the different Biblical and methodological components of the *midrash*. The students used Judaic Classics to locate the Biblical verses. Then, in Part II, the students were asked to paraphrase the *midrash*, using these components, and to provide explanatory notes, when

necessary. By being presented in a contemporary rhetorical style, the *midrash* might be more easily understood.

C. Meaning of Passover Section

In order to develop a section on the meaning of Passover, each student was asked to complete the form below:

Answer any number of the questions below.   If you chose only a few questions, you will need to elaborate. Your answer may be handwritten. There is no minimum that you need to write. The key here is the quality of your thoughts.

1. What is the meaning of *Pesach*?
2. How does the use of symbols enhance our understanding of this meaning?
3. What do I enjoy the most during the *seder*?
4. How do not eating *chametz* and the eating of *matza* enrich our lives?

The answers were then combined into one composite answer. The purpose of this section was to ensure that the students had an opportunity to reflect on the meaning of the holiday, as they worked on the halachic section using the *Shulchan Aruch*, which emphasized the practices of the holiday. It was important, as well, for the finished product--the Passover website--to reflect this balance.

D. Annotated Bibliography of Links

The students were left to their own devices to come up with a list of links related to Passover. The teacher also gave the students a number of suggestions, including those for the major religious movements in Judaism.   Then, a group of students read through parts of these websites and wrote notes that would guide the potential reader. Links were established, enabling the reader to connect directly to each of these websites.

III. Educational Implications
A. Curricular Implications for Use of Passover Website as an Educational Tool

This Passover website could also be the basis for a variety of learning activities. The section on the *Shulchan Aruch* could be studied as part of a unit describing the role of the notes of Rabbi Moses Isserles on Rabbi Joseph Caro's *Shulchan Aruch*. As part of this unit, the students might be given an exercise to help them understand how Rabbi Isserles presents alternate and updated practices. The students could then study other passages from the *Shulchan Aruch* on another topic and identify what Rabbi Isserles is doing there. This could also be connected to a lesson on the differences between Ashkenazic and Sephardic practices. (Rabbi Caro was Sephardic and Rabbi Isserles was Ashkenazic.)

The m*idrash* section could be used a model for teaching *midrash*. The unit could begin by having students read the *midrash* section on the Passover website and then describe how *midrash* functions in learning lessons from Biblical verses. With the Passover website models in mind, the students could analyze other *midrashim,* using the worksheet (cited above) that was used in preparation of the *midrash* section of the Passover website. The result of the students' work would be summaries similar in style to those on the Passover website. A less complex learning activity would be for students to study just

those *midrashim* on the Passover website. This could be done with or without referring to the original text of the *midrash*.

The following are additional learning activities:

1. The worksheet in the Appendix could be used as an exercise, with students working individually or in groups.

2. The worksheet in the Appendix could be used as an "open-website test", whereby the students, working independently, would answer content questions based on the Passover website, referring to the website for the answers. This graded activity would require a greater level of accountability of performance.

3. Potential sources of fun activities using the links include playing the various Passover games, solving the various puzzles, and answering the questions on Passover quizzes.

4. The links section of the Passover website could also be used for mini-research activities. For example, students might be asked to determine whether a certain product is kosher for Passover by searching the "Guide to Kosher Passover Foods" in the "OU Guide to Kashrut on *Pesach*".

5. Another assignment would be for students to look up the answers to specific halachic questions by referring to the *responsa* on the "Reform Responsa" link.

6. Another learning activity would be for students to write reports based on different selections from the website links. The students, working alone, or with a partner, would then share their findings with their classmates. The teacher would coordinate this program to insure that the areas covered would not overlap much, but would complement each other.

7. The rationale, objectives, description of the process of preparation of website, curriculum implications, and side benefits (described below) may inspire other learning activities and projects, not necessarily similar to the project described, and not even computer related.

B. Side Benefits of the Process of Preparing the Website
There were a number of side benefits that resulted from work on the website project, enhancing the learning experience:
   1. Students had the opportunity to develop organizational skills.
   2. Students had the opportunity to develop group work skills.
   3. Students had the opportunity to carry to completion a long-range project from start to finish and to feel the satisfaction associated with its completion.
   4. Students had the opportunity to participate in a variety of active, learning experiences (reading, translating, writing by hand, writing with a computer, "surfing the web", group work, individual work with the teacher, looking up

sources in the library, accessing information on computer software, discussing ideas, organizing, etc.)
5. Students had the opportunity to have fun through the ongoing social interaction that was an integral part of the group work.

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Appendix - Worksheet using Passover website

Name_____ Passover website http://www.cesjds.org/~passover/

Chametz
1. Where does one search for *chametz*?

2. What blessing is said prior to searching?

3. State two rules regarding checking of *chametz* during the day of Nisan 14.

4. What kind of light may you use to check for *chametz*?

5. Why does one need to search synagogues and academies?

6. What is the procedure for searching for *chametz* for one who goes on a trip within 30 days before Passover?

7. What is the procedure for searching for *chametz* for one who goes on a trip before 30 days before Passover, if one's intention is not to return during Passover?

Erev Pesach

1. According to the Sages, when is it forbidden to eat *chametz*?

2. According to the Sages, when is it forbidden to derive benefit from *chametz*?

3. State one way of conducting Shabbat meals when *erev Pesach* falls on a Shabbat.

4. When *erev Pesach* falls on a Shabbat, why must *chametz* be removed before noon on Friday?

5. What is the ruling about doing work before noon on *erev Pesach*?

6. Who should fast on the *erev Pesach*?

7. What are the restrictions on eating *erev Pesach* after the start of the 10th hour (3:00 pm on a "perfect day", which is a day of twelve equal hours of daylight from 6:00am to 6:00pm) and why are there such restrictions?

The *Seder*

1. Why are toasted nuts and snacks given to young children during the *seder*?

2. What is the order for k*iddush* when the *seder* occurs on a Saturday night?

3. What blessing is made for the first dipping?

4. What practice does Rabbi Joseph Caro advocate for blessings before each of the four cups?

5. What practice does Rabbi Moses Isserles advocate for blessings before each of the four cups?

6. Why may one not swallow the *maror* without tasting it?

7. Why should the *afikoman* be eaten before midnight?

The Prayer Service
1. What is mentioned in the middle blessing of the *amidah* on the first and last days of Passover?

2. Is *kiddush* recited in the synagogue during the evening service?

3. What prayer is inserted in the third to last blessing of the *amidah* during the intermediate days of Passover?

4. Does one recite the *shehechiyanu* during the *kiddush* on the last two nights of Passover?

The *Omer*
1. When does one begin the counting of the *omer*?

2. How would one count the *omer* on the 16th day of the *omer*?

3. If one were to ask you at twilight how many days of the *omer* should be counted that night, how should you respond?

Midrashim
1. Why did God tell Moses in advance that Pharaoh would not let the Israelites go?

2. Why did God harden the hearts of the Egyptians?

3. What does the *Midrash* learn from the use of the word "officers"?

4. According to the *Midrash*, what can one learn from the fact that Moses took the bones of Joseph with him when leaving Egypt?

5. How does the *Midrash* learn about the power of the Israelites' prayer from Biblical verses about Jacob?

6. How does the *Midrash* learn that the Shabbat is of equal importance with all other *mitzvot*?

7. What do Joseph and Joshua have in common?

8. What did Jethro give to Moses?

9. Why was Jethro called Hobab?

Meaning of Passover
In a sentence or two, describe what Passover means to you.

Links
Pick two links, and in a sentence or two for each, describe what you found.